

In this way Europeans heard of that distant land, and many were the fables related of its rich mines, its people, fruits and animals. Merchants wished to reach it, and travellers who had been there and to China, came back and told that there was a great sea to the east of Asia, like that to the west of Europe. As time went on, the strife in trade increased, and Spain and Portugal became the greatest of commercial nations. Brave mariners ventured to sail down the coast of Africa, and the Portuguese had small settlements here and there, as far as the Cape of Good Hope, but their ships were yet too frail to weather its storms, and their courage was not bold enough to lead them around it.

8. All these years learned men, merchants and sailors were thinking of the Atlantic Ocean, and wondering whither a voyage westward on its waters would lead them. Some thought, and among them **Christopher Columbus**, a brave sailor from Genoa in Italy, that it must be the same sea that washed the east coast of China, and that by it they might find a shorter way to the famous India. But none were willing to venture, until, in A.D. 1492, Queen Isabella of Spain fitted out three small ships for this purpose, and gave the command of them to Columbus. This great man was the first to believe that land could be reached in this direction, and he was engaged several years in trying to persuade the kings of different countries to give him ships, before the Queen of Spain granted his request. In August of that year he set out from Palos, in Spain, and on the 12th of October landed on one of the islands of the Bahama group. After exploring many of the islands now called the West Indies, he returned to Europe, taking with him specimens of gold, and fruits, and several of the natives, whom he called **Indians**, for he thought he had landed on islands near the eastern